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"She Hath Done What She Could"
A Sermon

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“SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD.”

A SERMON.

RALEIGH, N. C.

Printed by Seaton Gales.

1851.

“SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD,”

OR THE

DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY OF WOMAN;

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL OF ST. MARY'S SCHOOL,

BY THE RECTOR,

AND PRINTED FOR THE PUPILS AT THEIR REQUEST.

R A L E I G H :

Printed by Seaton Gales.

1851.

“FAVOUR IS DECEITFUL, AND BEAUTY IS
VAIN; BUT A WOMAN THAT FEARETH THE
LORD, SHALL BE PRAISED.”

Prov. 31: xxx.

Cp 378
S14K2
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S E R M O N.

“ SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD.”

St. Mark, 14th Chap. 8th Verse.

THIS encomium was bestowed upon a female disciple of the Saviour for a special act of love and devotion. She had poured upon his head a box of Ointment of Spikenard, very precious; and when she was rebuked for the apparent waste, our gracious Saviour not only vindicated his shrinking daughter from the charge, but cheered her affectionate heart, and commended to imitation her generous zeal, in the all-expressive eulogy, “She hath done what she could.”

Attractive as is the contemplation thus afforded of affectionate zeal and devotion on the one hand, and of infinite grace and condescension on the other, I propose to invite your attention to a more general subject, very naturally suggested by the words of the text, and not, I trust, without important practical application and interest.

I purpose, then, to consider the duties and responsibilities of a woman,—thus showing, not only what she can do, but what she must do, if she would be entitled to the commendation, “She hath done what she could.”

P 32839

To treat a subject of such fulness in the most brief and direct manner, let us consider, 1st, what a woman *can* do, and, therefore, what she should endeavor to do, in the period of her life, which precedes her entrance upon the relations of wife and mother.

These relations are so interesting and momentous, that, at the mention of female duty and responsibility, they immediately arise in the mind, and almost engross it.

What injustice is thus done to our subject, let the lives of those faithful women testify, who have voluntarily foregone these tender relations, that, unembarrassed by any selfish cares, they might pursue their unwearied path of benevolence amid the private dwellings of poverty, of sickness, and of ignorance, or in the Institutions which public charity has opened for the alleviation of human woe.

But without insisting upon a measure of Christian self-sacrifice, that certainly cannot be generally demanded of the sex, however beautiful in the sight of men, and acceptable in the sight of God, it may be in particular instances, we may find in the period of a woman's life, which we are considering, much that she can do to promote the glory of God, and diffuse happiness around her.

Even in her early youth, what essential aid may an affectionate daughter render to a mother, "cumbered," perhaps, and overburthened with the cares of her household. By her assiduous attentions towards her younger brothers and sisters, by the aid she may give them in their lessons and in their sports, by the gentle supervision and restraint she may exercise over them in the absence of the maternal eye, by the beautiful example she may afford them, of obedience and filial duty, by her sympathy and assistance in their little troubles and sorrows, and by supplying her mother's place in other departments of the household, superintending, or performing, as the case may be, those domestic offices, which only a woman's hand can execute, and on the fulfilment of which, domestic happiness and comfort

so much depend, how may a Christian daughter repay the care and pains of which her own childhood was the object —revive and rejoice the hearts of her parents, when they droop with weariness and anxiety, and almost justify their exulting sentiment, “Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.”

But from the peculiar position of a woman at this period of her life, a very serious responsibility is often thrown upon her for the due employment of her time.

The young man is very early apprenticed to the business or profession he is to pursue for a maintenance; and in the studies or labors exacted by this preparation, he finds wholesome and constant occupation.

But how often has the young woman many hours of every day at her command—hours not seldom lost through indolence, frittered away in dress, and vanity or gossip, or, worse than all, consumed in the perusal of works of fiction, generally of a light and enervating, sometimes even of a corrupt and debasing character.

How much in these hours might one, seriously disposed to do what she could, accomplish for her own mental improvement, by such reading and studies, as will fit her, not only to sustain well her part in general society, but to discharge, with grace and intelligence, the engrossing duties of her after life, which leave so little time for the pursuits of taste and literature.

In her hours of social intercourse, how much may even a young woman, if she be pious and intelligent, effect, in giving grace and dignity to the tone of conversation—in repressing the effusions of scandal, or the ridicule of serious things; in a word, in rendering virtue and goodness fascinating, by the attractive association in which they are presented. Indeed, I must be permitted here to say, that a high standard of female refinement, intelligence and piety, is the best, perhaps the only, security for similar qualities in men.

Let the fop and the profligate — the unintelligent drudge in business and slave of Mammon, find access to the smiles and esteem of our daughters, as readily as the man of approved virtue and cultivated mind, and one of the strongest stimulants to industry and self-denial will be removed, by the thoughtless and reckless bestowal of the fairest earthly prize. Surely in this view, a very serious responsibility attaches to early womanhood.

Nor in another social view, is it less burdened. At no period of life, is a woman more at liberty to exercise towards the poor, the ignorant, and the distressed, those offices of love, which so well become her sex, and which she can discharge without overstepping the limits of the most shrinking modesty. She must be singularly circumstanced, indeed, who has not, within her own knowledge, some humble pensioner, to whom she can carry a cup of cold water, or a more substantial tribute, while she administers what, often, is more highly valued by the object of her bounty — the looks and words of sympathy and kindness.

Without dwelling in detail upon every method, in which a faithful daughter of the Church, by pious labors, and unobtrusive zeal, may render efficient service to her Divine Master, I must, at least, specify and urge the claims of one — I allude to the instruction of the ignorant. This is a duty which might be enforced upon selfish motives, alone. Nothing is more true, than that, "teaching, we learn." The very best method of systematizing and arranging our knowledge — of rendering its impression accurate, clear, and deep, and of realizing its value, so as to be stimulated to new acquisitions, is to endeavor to impart it to others. And the exercise of patience and forbearance — in a word, the self-discipline required of a teacher, is the best possible preparation of a woman for the peculiar duties of her after years.

In this connection, the labors of the Sunday School will

immediately occur to you. And well they may: for if the Pastor cannot look to the young women of his charge, for their devoted assistance in the care of the lambs of his flock, from whom else can he hope for such aid?

But I am not willing to limit to a single day of the week, the opportunity which many young women may have of doing good in this best, this doubly-blessing way. What is to prevent their devotion to this work of a portion of every day of the week? Is it the want of time? How many of their hours, not employed for purposes necessary or useful, nay, perhaps passed in listless apathy, or frivolous pursuits, cry out against this excuse! Is it for want of pupils? To say nothing of the opportunity of improving themselves and benefitting others, which public institutions for the education of their sex would gladly afford, what neighborhood would not furnish numbers who are growing up in ignorance and vice, in whose destiny an hour or two per day of such instruction, such counsel, such sympathy, as an intelligent christian woman could impart, could make all the difference there is between vice and virtue, despair and hope, misery and happiness, Hell and Heaven! Nay, in a community like ours, where we are surrounded in such numbers by servants born in our own house, and looking up to us for the supply of *every* want, surely the pious daughter need not go far, perhaps not beyond the precincts of her own abode, to find suitable objects of her benevolence, whose tender years, without transgressing any human law, and in the most angelic fulfilment of the divine law of love for all mankind, she might imbue with those lessons of piety, and those sound words of scripture, and of prayer, which, while they would make them more faithful servants of their masters upon earth, might also invest them with the freedom of the skies.

If I have said enough on this portion of the subject to make you feel how much is left unsaid, I am content, as the time compels to pass to the duties of a female in the relations of wife and mother.

And here I may say distinctly, what is perhaps implied in a preceding remark, that a woman who has given her heart and her hand, herself and her all, in the holy estate of matrimony, to a man, in whose moral and religious integrity she has not good reason to confide, has in one of the points most essential to her own welfare, and the good of the community, failed to do what she could, and exposed herself to the severest retribution. One of the first conditions of the married state is, that the desire of the wife shall be to her husband, and that he shall rule over her? "Wives," says St. Peter, "be in subjection to your own husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord." "The Husband," says St. Paul, "is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church." How important then, nay how imperative, is it, that, in taking the step which links her "for better, for worse, till death do them part," to one who is henceforward to be "the disposer of her destiny," she should be influenced more by a regard to the moral and intellectual qualities, which, in her guide and head, she can honor and reverence, than to his possession of personal attractions, or incidental advantages, however great and desirable. But we know that Satan himself may assume for his own purposes, the form of an angel of light. We need not wonder then, that the unsuspecting affections of a woman are sometimes gained, before the darker shades in the character of their object are discovered, and thus *he* becomes possessed of the power and rights of a *husband*, who scarce deserves the name of a *man*. It is also too true, that many who are thus disappointed in their dearest hopes, are the victims of a sinful infatuation, or a criminal neglect. But however this may be, the arrangement which consigns a woman to the authority and to the mercy of a man who has no sympathy in her holiest feelings—who may be disposed to set before his family and society an example of irreligion and immorality—who may

even drown his reason in the drunkard's bowl, and vent upon the woman he has sworn to cherish the insane excitement of his mirth, or the morbid dejection and nervous irritability of which he has become the prey, till his rightful authority degenerates into a brutal tyranny, and her wedded life becomes a prolonged martyrdom, this arrangement is often the severest test of what a woman can do, who is imbued with the love of God, and sustained by his grace. And even without the supposition of an extreme case, it may be said that the little faults in the temper, habits, or manners of a husband, which the intimacy of married life reveals to the eyes of a wife, and the little but perpetual trials to which she may be thus constantly subjected, serve to bring out into beautiful relief some of the most valuable and difficult graces a Christian can cultivate or exhibit. Thus, the patience, the humility, the meekness, the long-suffering, the heavenly-mindedness, which our blessed religion requires and originates, become most favorably known to the husband, and address him in the most winning and persuasive manner. And here, it seems to me, is indicated the most important duty of the Christian wife. From natural temperament, and the circumstances of her daily life, she is more sensitive than her husband to the appeals of religion, and less exposed to the dangers and temptations of the world. While, then, it should be her endeavor to render the home of her husband a place of rest from the toils of business—of comforts amid the disappointments of life—of cheerful recreation amid its cares—it should be, especially her effort to make it the residence of purity and piety. Against anger, clamor, wrath, bitterness, evil-speaking, murmurs, discontent, reproaches, and complainings, the door should be effectually shut; while for meekness gentleness, resignation, forbearance, hope, peace and joy, there should be an abundant entrance, and a perpetual welcome! In this way, may the Christian wife often become the minister to her husband's salvation. She may be

to him, at all times, a preacher of righteousness, improving every event of sorrow or of joy, into some delightful lesson of Christian patience, or gratitude, or moderation. Not that she will seize every opportunity of inculcating in language the truths and precepts of the gospel, or ever obtrude in an offensive manner her remonstrances and appeals. The preaching of the wife to be effectual, and "to win the husband," must be simply her faithful exhibition in all her conduct of the beauty and heavenly influence of religion. It should appear in her subjection to her husband's authority, in her affectionate attachment to him, and her evident wish to make him happy. It should be seen in the cheerful discharge of her domestic duties, in her maternal solicitude, especially for the spiritual welfare of her offspring; in her mild and christian, but watchful and careful control of her household, consulting by a wise economy the interests of her husband, and by a just distribution the comfort and happiness of her dependants and servants; in her forbearance towards the involuntary faults of the latter, her pains and patience in teaching them their duties, and the anxiety she manifests for their moral and religious improvement; in her performance of the gentle offices of charity towards her neighbors; in her assiduous endeavors to avail herself of all the public services of the sanctuary; in her evident, though unobtrusive attention to the private and most sacred duties of religion, and in the sacrifices she is willing to make of personal or domestic display, that she may have to give, and may enable and persuade her husband to give bountifully of his means, towards the labors of christian benevolence, and especially towards the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom. It is well known, that many, who in their matrimonial arrangements have thought only for their present happiness, have thus found in their believing wives the ministers to their everlasting bliss. What responsibility is thus thrown upon the christian woman? If she does what she can in this most interesting

relation, she may be the light, the joy, the salvation, of her husband and household; but if she is recreant to her obligations—if the wife is a deserter of her faith and its duties, the last hope, I had almost said, of husband and family, is gone forever!

It is however in the relation of mother, that female influence is most powerfully felt, and may be most effectually exerted for the welfare of its immediate objects and of society.

As the clay is in the hands of the potter, so, it may almost be said, are the hearts of her children, under the discipline of a pious and intelligent mother. Their first and deepest impressions are derived from her. Her constant presence with them in their most tender years, affords her every opportunity of moulding their character almost as she will.

If then she is fitted by piety and intelligence for her vocation, and does what she can, she may train her sons and daughters in those ways of wisdom and paths of peace, which terminate in the land of everlasting life.

Surely it need not be urged that this is the duty of a Christian Mother; that looking upon her offspring as immortal beings committed during their earliest and most dependent years to her special guardianship, she ought to spare no pains, to shrink from no self-denial, to employ every persuasion of love, every influence of authority, every argument of reason, every aid of the imagination, every provision of the Church, by which, she may be enabled to secure for her children the unspeakable blessings of the Gospel of Christ.

What disappointment and trials will wring the mother's heart, what constant need she will find for the exercise of every christian grace, and above all for fervent prayer, for undying patience, and implicit faith, they only can tell, who have been the most earnestly engaged in this noblest work of woman. But it is her duty to persevere; and she shall have her reward.

Having trained her children "in the way they should go," she may be assured they "will not depart from it." If her life is prolonged upon the earth, she will see them beloved and honored in society, and anxious by every filial assiduity to evince how entirely they attribute to her, the esteem and favor they enjoy ; and whenever she may be called from her labors here, she may bid them adieu in the firm and blessed hope, that they will be, "her joy and crown of rejoicing," in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

Though I have spoken only of the religious influence of a mother over her children, it is obvious, how much their taste, and manners, and general character must depend upon her plastic hand. Nay, is it not unfrequently the case from the isolated position of the families in a country so extensive as ours, and particularly in the newer portions of it, that the only dependence of children, and especially of daughters, for instruction of every sort, during many of the most important, because the most impresible years of their life, is upon their mother. Burdened as she is, under such circumstances, with *every care* that can occupy a house-keeper, obliged to do with her own hands, what in more settled districts the division of labor assigns to many — what physical endurance, what exhaustless energy, what triumphant patience, what wise economy of time and of resources, must that mother exercise, who, amid all her other duties, yet considers every day as lost, of which a part is not devoted to the education of her children.

Is the picture too highly wrought to be realized in our selfish and sinful world ? Are the powers of the mother taxed beyond their strength in this representation ? Perhaps, my brethren, any capabilities but those of a mother would fail under such requirements. But they are no more than a mother can fulfil ; they are no more than mothers, within my own knowledge, have fulfilled, and are now fulfilling ; they are no more than every mother in similar cir-

cumstances must fulfil, if she would discharge acceptably her high and holy mission, and be entitled to the commendation, "She hath done what she could."

I have touched, my brethren, upon some of the more obvious heads of female duty and responsibility. Much more remains unsaid; yet meagre as the outline is, it must be sadly felt, how seldom, in actual life, it is filled out.

Of the young, how many are the mere votaries of fashion and pleasure! Of wives, how many are the willing companions of their husbands, in a life of worldly extravagance and vanity! Of mothers, how many are there, who even foster the passions and habits in their children, which are sure to lead to their ruin!

And why may these, and numerous similar questions, be asked with such mortifying effect? Alas, my brethren, the answer reveals a radical error. The true mission of woman has not been generally felt and understood. The controlling and sanctifying influence she can exert, has not been appreciated; what she can do to refine, and elevate, and bless mankind, has not been properly estimated; and she has, therefore, been sent forth on her high vocation, too often entirely ignorant of its responsibilities, and utterly unfitted to discharge them.

What is the process that is too frequently considered an adequate preparation of a woman for the duties and responsibilities under which she lies?

A young girl, between the period of infancy and that of early youth, is allowed to acquire such secular knowledge and accomplishments, as may be conveniently attained in a desultory attendance at school, and such religious information as is comprised in a few formularies, sacred hymns and verses in the Bible, all in themselves most excellent, but taught without unction, acquired without interest, and often as the *penalty for misconduct*, and, therefore, exerting no favorable practical influence. Having reached the age at which she *begins* to understand what she reads, and appreciate what she learns, and having acquired some ele-

mentary acquaintance with books in her own tongue—a few phrases of a foreign language—a few tunes upon an instrument of music—and, perhaps, the ability to sketch a rose, or copy a landscape, she is permitted to enter society. In this sphere, without any *prescribed* course of reading, or study, with very few restraints upon her liberty, she is allowed to amuse herself, till her affections and hand being engaged, she is led to the matrimonial altar. In this new relation, the deep feelings of conjugal and maternal love—the experience she acquires by her daily mistakes and trials—the efforts she may make to repair the past, and to fulfil the duties which she sees to be growing around her—the judicious counsels of friends, and the enlightening grace of God, operating through these and other means, may save the wife and mother, the husband and children from the destiny that seemed so imminent.

But how much more naturally—alas, how much more ordinarily, does it result from such a union, that the most solemn duties, assumed without reflection or preparation, indeed without any adequate conception of their existence, are utterly neglected, and another generation arises, having no cause to call their mother blessed.

In a word, my brethren, to bring this discourse to a conclusion, a woman who does what she can in the several relations assigned to her in life, is the fairest embodiment on earth, of Christian principle and duty.

Her influence over man, through those natural avenues to his heart, by which she alone can approach, is almost irresistible for his present good and his eternal felicity.

If she *will* do what she *can*, in the illustration and exemplification of our holy faith, she *can* do almost what she *will* for the moral and spiritual welfare of the world. But, to accomplish this, she must understand her high and heavenly mission.

For this purpose, she must be trained from her infancy in the knowledge and love of her duties towards God and

man. In line upon line, and precept upon precept, must this instruction be imparted. With persuasive accents—with looks of love—with unwearied explanations and illustrations—with consistent and holy example must it be enforced, until it is received into the heart, and there sustained by the habitual endeavor to practice what has been enjoined.

In secular knowledge, after the necessary elementary study, a broad and deep foundation must be laid in those departments of study, which tend to strengthen and establish the mind, and improve the reasoning faculties; nor should the lighter accomplishments of a woman, for which she has a taste, and which her circumstances allow her to pursue, be without their share of diligent attention; and this course should be pursued, if possible, under wise and authoritative direction, till its effect on the pupil's mind is evident to all, and she has acquired both a taste for profitable knowledge and the ability to appreciate and digest her studies.

When, at length, she enters society, it should be under the guardianship of one capable of securing her against its snares and dangers; and her domestic duties—her intellectual improvement—her social pleasures, and her offers of charity towards the poor and ignorant, should all be allowed their fair proportion of her time.

Thus fitted and prepared for the holy estate of matrimony, she is the richest prize—she is the dearest treasure this earth contains for man. Let her be entrusted only to one, who will esteem her very highly, in love for her own, and her work's sake.

To such a one she will prove a wife, including in herself “all joys;” to his children, a mother who will fulfil all that the sacred name imports; to his household a mistress in whom authority will be graciously tempered with love; to society an ornament and a blessing; and, as the crown and reward of all, she shall have the answer of her conscience,

and the testimony of her God, that "She hath done what she could."

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ALMIGHTY GOD, WHO THROUGH THINE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON JESUS CHRIST, HAS OVERCOME DEATH, AND OPENED TO US THE GATE OF EVERLASTING LIFE; WE HUMBLY BESEECH THEE THAT, AS BY THY SPECIAL GRACE PREVENTING US, THAT DOST PUT INTO OUR MINDS GOOD DESIRES; SO BY THY CONTINUAL HELP WE MAY BRING THE SAME TO GOOD EFFECT, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO LIVETH AND REIGNETH WITH THEE AND THE HOLY GHOST, EVER ONE GOD, WORLD WITHOUT END. *Amen.*

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